



**CGA Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing March 10, 2008**

**HB 5026, AA Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Regarding Education
Comments Submitted by Katherine Wilson, School Finance Specialist**

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut supports a system of public education funding that makes available to each community financial resources sufficient to provide a suitable program of educational experiences to each child. We believe the state should...

- Fund through grants to towns 50% of the overall statewide cost of public elementary and secondary education.
- Distribute funds in a way that recognizes both the relative ability of different communities to finance schools from local resources and the various factors that influence the cost of educating different children.
- Target additional funds toward improving academic achievement in communities with concentrations of disadvantaged children.

The League is disappointed that the governor's budget recommendations include no improvement to the level of funding provided for the Education Cost Sharing grant in FY '09. At the current slow rate of phase-in, it will take far too many years for the 2007 overhaul of the ECS formula to be fully funded, and towns will ultimately find themselves in no better position to pay for the rising cost of education than they were before the overhaul was enacted. The cycle of an under-funded state aid formula driving over-dependence on a regressive local property tax to pay for education will continue.

Moreover, the present method of phasing in funding for the revised ECS formula, while seemingly fair, has in reality exacerbated the inequities that already existed among towns under the ECS cap. There are currently 44 towns across the state whose ECS grants for 2008 are **less than half** of what their fully funded grant would be, while at the same time 50 other towns are receiving **over 70%** of their fully funded grant. The 4.4% minimum increase funded for 2009 will widen those disparities.

We would like to see the ECS phase-in percentage for FY '09 increased from the current nominal 23.3% to a funded 35%, with the further stipulation that no town will receive less than 60% of its fully funded grant. Such a change would provide greater equity among Connecticut towns and real, immediate property tax relief to Connecticut rate payers. It would also make the way we as a state pay for education a bit fairer by transferring more of the burden to the somewhat more progressive state portfolio of taxes.

The League is also concerned about the governor's \$1.8 million reduction to School Readiness Funding, characterized as an adjustment for preschool slots that go partially unfilled in priority school districts. Given the importance of early education to later academic success, we wonder whether those dollars could instead be reallocated from districts with such unfilled slots to districts that could fill additional ones.

Finally, we would also like to see the Special Education Excess Cost Multiplier reduced from 4.5 to 3.0 in order to lessen the impact that the high cost of educating severely disabled children can have on local finances, particularly in very small towns.

If projected state revenues are inadequate to cover the cost of these proposals, the League supports increasing the progressivity of the state income tax.